

Ildi Eperjesi & Oleksandr Kachura

Shreds of War. Vol. 2

Fates from Crimea 2015–2022

With an interview of Oleh Sentsov

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Collected by Andreas Umland

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PREFACE

Immediately after publishing our book entitled *Shreds of War. Fates From the Donbas Frontline 2015-2019*, I and my co-author, Oleksandr Kachura, were planning to start writing our next book. The pandemic, however, prevented us from working for a long time.

Since it made it impossible to travel, we used the achievements of modern technology and often established contact via Internet with the characters of the second part of our new volume. They told us about the changes the "Russian world" had brought to Crimea since its illegal annexation by Moscow in 2014.

I was extremely anxious while working. While compiling the book, one could feel the forewind of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022. We finished work literally on the eve of this extremely evil act. While doing the interviews, the thought was always reoccurring deep inside me, "What will happen if a bigger war breaks out? Are we going to talk to or meet these people again?"

I had this anxiety first back in 2008, when Russia attacked the tiny Caucasus country of Georgia. It was then that the current Russian president first tested the foreign deployment of his resurgent army, after he had already "introduced order" in Chechnya, where Russian soldiers massacred hundreds of thousands of civilians, and the capital, Grozny, was razed to the ground.

The world, however, remained silent so Putin went on. Georgia followed, then Crimea, the Donbas, Syria, and finally the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian president came to power in 2000 on the wings of a war he provoked, thereby gaining notoriety and popularity. If his support at home dwindles, you can count on him trying to solve

the situation by starting a war. Therefore, the brutal invasion launched against Ukraine, was no surprise to me.

Ever since I visited the Donbas, I have been talking about the need to do everything in order to avoid another massacre, genocide, and a bigger war. My words didn't go far. History repeats itself, and contrary to what the communists claimed, tragedy repeats itself not as a comedy but as a greater disaster. That's why Oleksandr and I consider it important to present the events faithfully, even if we are voices crying out in the wilderness.

Ildi Eperjesi

Budapest, February 2022

Dear reader,

I am very glad that you are holding our book in your hands. Without the second part, which is about the Crimean peninsula, our series of *Shreds of War* would be incomplete.

After reading our first volume, *Fates from the Donbas Frontline 2015-2019*, you may have had the feeling that we haven't said everything yet so we decided to fill in this gap and give a snappy answer to the Russian propaganda that has been raging on the occupied Ukrainian peninsula for more than eight years now.

I have many ties to Crimea. I spent every summer vacation there when I was a child. My family sent me to the peninsula to get healed. I learned to swim there, I saw mountains for the first time there, I traveled around and visited Sevastopol. I remember the pre-occupation peninsula with nostalgia because it was fixed in my memory just like that.

In 2015, I decided to travel to Crimea as a reporter without obtaining Russian accreditation. I had to work in secret, which was risky for me. During the interviews done at a school, the security guards caught me and when they found out that I had come from mainland Ukraine, they wanted to hand me over to the police. Fortunately, I managed to escape and continue my work.

All my coverages were published in Ukrainian online newspapers. I presented the real situation in the occupied territory to the Ukrainian audience pulling back the curtain of Russian propaganda and lies.

The people I've been able to talk to have surprised me with their perspective when telling their stories. They were initially enthusiastic about "Crimea-is-ours", fueled by Russian propaganda but then they turned melancholic and even hopeless. The ever-increasing prices experienced since the illegal annexation have taken the last bit from the locals, and inflation is

gradually eating away at incomes. The redistribution of power, unsuccessful holiday seasons, empty luxury hotels and restaurants – this is what has characterized the occupied peninsula ever since.

What's more, Crimea has turned into a large security facility, a kind of Russian Alcatraz, with a separate section for fans of the Russian world.

Ildi and I were also interested in the current situation and opinions of the Crimean people, so the book consists of two parts – first the reports from 2015 and then recent interviews with the emblematic characters of the historic events that have taken place in Crimea.

The history of the annexation of Crimea is full of betrayals and lies, as the soldiers of the Ukrainian army and the so-called "we-weren't-there" told us.

Ukraine, however, sooner or later will get Crimea back so all Ukrainian patriots and the Crimean Tatar people will return home.

Oleksandr Kachura
Kramatorsk, February 2022